



House Select Committee on Homeland Security Democrats

JIM TURNER, Ranking Member

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**Contact: Moira Whelan
(202) 226-8827**

TURNER OFFERS BUDGET AMENDMENT: PROTECTING THE HOMELAND—NO DUTY MORE IMPORTANT

Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Member of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, presented an amendment to the House Rules Committee today that would restore homeland security spending priorities in the House Budget Resolution.

The Turner Amendment will increase resources for homeland security by more than \$1.3 billion above the total reported by the Budget Committee. It will:

- Make needed security improvements on our passenger and transit rail systems,
- Deploy radiation portal monitors,
- Boost funding for the state homeland security grants and interoperable communications gear,
- Increase port security efforts, and
- Increase airport and air cargo security, and make needed infrastructure improvements at our nation's borders.

The amendment will also result in a decrease in the federal deficit for next fiscal year of \$346 million by taking advantage of the \$1.7 billion that can be saved through suspending current and future planned deliveries of oil to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

Turner's statement follows:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Earlier this month, in ceremonies marking the one year anniversary of the Department of Homeland Security, the President stated that, to secure the American homeland and protect the American people, "There is no duty more important." I certainly agree with that statement. We must do all that we can, as fast as we can, to protect our nation from terrorists.

We cannot forget that we are at war against al Qaeda and like-minded groups. We cannot forget that we must maintain the same sense of urgency and commitment in protecting our homeland that we had immediately after the attacks of September 11. The budget resolution for next fiscal year must reflect that sense of urgency and commitment.

I am concerned, however, that the budget resolution, as reported by the Budget Committee, will not result in the kind of commitment to homeland security that we truly need. Not only does it fail to remedy some of the shortcomings in the President's budget, but it even cuts funding from the President's budget.

That is why I have submitted the amendment that we are now considering. The amendment is designed to achieve the following results:

First – it will restore the \$155 million cut to the President's homeland security budget that has been proposed in the Republican budget resolution. I find it shocking that – in a time of war and obvious threats to the homeland – the budget resolution would not provide the funding that the President believes is necessary to protect the American people.

Second, the amendment will add \$1.2 billion above the total reported by the Budget Committee for our most urgent homeland security needs. Specifically, it will allow the Department of Homeland Security to use additional resources to:

- Make needed security improvements on our passenger and transit rail systems, which – as the recent Madrid bombing underscored – still remain dangerously vulnerable to a terrorist attack;
- Ensure that radiation portal monitors – which can be used to detect the presence of a weapon of mass destruction at our nation's ports of entry – are deployed to all of our seaports, border crossings, and related sites by the end of next year;
- Boost funding for the state homeland security grants, and interoperable communications gear, to help ensure that our nation's first responders have the equipment and training they need to respond to a terrorist attack;
- Increase port security efforts, consistent with Coast Guard recommendations; and
- Allow for increased airport and air cargo security, along with needed infrastructure improvements at our nation's borders.

Third - in addition to increasing resources to help satisfy some of our most urgent homeland security needs, the amendment will also result in a decrease in the federal deficit for next fiscal year. The decrease, which totals \$346 million, includes both a principal amount of \$340 million and a corresponding savings of \$6 million in net interest. Modest amounts of deficit reduction are also achieved through lower interest needs beyond fiscal year 2005.

To achieve the goals of increased resources for homeland security and an additional amount for deficit reduction, the amendment takes advantage of \$1.7 billion that can be saved through suspending current and future planned deliveries of oil to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

The Strategic Petroleum Reserve, first authorized in 1975 to provide for a dedicated supply of oil for the country, is currently about 92 percent full, with roughly 650 million barrels of oil in storage. The total capacity of the Reserve is 700 million barrels, which, assuming the current delivery schedule, it will reach next fiscal year. While the Strategic Reserve is close to its full amount, however, gas and oil prices are at, or near, record high levels throughout the country.

One reason why prices are so high is that commercial petroleum inventories are low. By continuing to deliver oil to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, however, we are making the situation worse. Instead, we should allow oil slated to go into the Reserve to be sold on the open market, thereby allowing the private sector to increase its capacity. Through the laws of supply and demand, this will result, according to one estimate, in a decrease in gasoline prices by 10 to 25 cents per gallon.

While consumers could enjoy lower gasoline prices as we head into the traditional spring and summer travel seasons, canceling deliveries of oil to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve will allow the federal government to take advantage of \$1.7 billion in additional receipts. These receipts can then be put towards important homeland security needs, such as funding port security improvements that are important to the oil and gas industry. Additionally, 20 percent of the additional receipts can be set aside for deficit reduction.

Canceling planned deliveries of oil to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and using the resulting receipts for homeland security purposes and deficit reduction is already a bipartisan initiative; a similar amendment, sponsored by Senators Levin and Collins, passed the Senate on March 12. By approving my amendment, we will take an important step towards making the initiative bicameral, as well as bipartisan.

I urge you to approve my amendment. I would be happy to answer any questions that you have.

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